

Vote of Thanks – IBSA Gandhi-Mandela Freedom Lecture

By Brazil's Ambassador to New Delhi

Mr. President and Madame Ramaphosa,
Prime Minister Narendra Modi,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mr Raghavan, thank you for including me in this extraordinary event. I have to commend President Ramaphosa for this wonderful lecture that we were honoured to hear.

As we honor Gandhi and Mandela, my mind is inevitably drawn to how India, Brazil and South Africa, three dazzlingly singular countries, have come to share so much in our values and in the plights of our history, and how natural it is for us to work together on the international stage united by IBSA.

Gandhi and Mandela are revered as champions in the struggle for freedom. They stood out for their courage and originality in facing the evils of colonialism and racism with a message of conciliation, non-violence, acceptance of differences and peace.

In Brazil, Gandhi and Mandela inspire the admiration of people of all backgrounds. And this is so, I believe, because we find that so much of our own ideals resonate with their messages. They are inspirations to us

Like India and South Africa, Brazil had to rise from colonial rule, and had to face the legacy of poverty, slavery, exploitation of native populations and many other forms of injustice colonialism left behind. And like India and South Africa, we chose to tread the path of peace. Brazil, it is said, is a child of diplomacy. In spite of its size and of sharing borders with ten other countries, we succeeded in negotiating the

contours of our map without aggression and war. This has shaped our culture throughout history and established the confidence of the Brazilian people in diplomacy.

Our nations find common ground, furthermore, in the vibrancy of our democracies. The strength of our institutions has allowed us to find novel, objective and national solutions to our challenges. Brazil, after difficult years of political, economic and moral crisis, has given President Bolsonaro a clear mandate to bring about a new moment for our country. President Ramaphosa, you have met with him yesterday in Davos. In this year that India chairs IBSA and Brazil chairs BRICS, President Ramaphosa and Prime Minister Modi, President Bolsonaro looks forward to host you in Brazil.

15 years ago, the creation of IBSA provided a platform for our countries to find a common voice. IBSA brought together three dynamic, multiethnic and multicultural democracies; three emerging economies seeking to play a larger active role in world affairs; one from each of the three continents that were, almost completely, under colonial rule.

But now, in the 21st Century, many of the best solutions for the problems the world faces are developed in our countries. Our nations embrace our cultural diversity, and know that our complexities and contradictions can be and become our greatest strengths. We have, in fact, anticipated, in our own countries, many of the central debates of the contemporary world.

When we picture Gandhi and Mandela in our minds, we always remember them with a smile on their faces. Here we find another deep bond uniting us: the optimism that chooses life in the face of adversity and challenges sorrow with joy. I'll now mention something that may be curious, but which is certainly symbolic. When Gandhi died, a community of labourers in the city of Salvador, descendants of African slaves, christened themselves the "Sons of Gandhi" [Filhos de Gandhy].

They mourned the Mahatma; but they, too, knew how to disarm their sorrows with a smile. Every year since, the Sons of Gandhi have paraded on the streets, dressed in the likeness of the Mahatma, performing music and dances originated in Africa, uniting people of all races to bring a message of peace during Carnival. They are Brazilians proud of our country's African roots and inspired by the Mahatma's example.

Our natural confluence in multilateral forums, about many of the most pressing international issues today, pays testimony to the strength of IBSA, and how much we are yet to achieve working together. Because, to this day, indignation at the unjust and the unjustifiable, which is the greatest force of historical progress, has in democracy the best vehicle to influence reality. The leadership and coordination of our three countries towards sustainable development, be it in the Conferences of Johannesburg, Rio or Hyderabad, would certainly please both Gandhi and Mandela.

I must here express my gratitude to the Indian chairship of IBSA and its ongoing efforts to raise the forum to its full potential.